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FIG. 1. LATE GOTHIC CHEST
FRENCH, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

THE HOENTSCHEL COLLECTION

GOthic SECTION

II. ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS AND FURNITURE

OF the eight double columns which form an entrance to the collection, six illustrate admirably the transition from the Romanesque to the Gothic style (beginning of the thirteenth century). Their capitals still retain the square formation, rounded at the bottom, which in the Romanesque style constitutes a pleasing gradation between the round column and four-cornered crown block, but the cubic form is already concealed by climbing, naturalistic foliage ornaments of the early

Gothic style. In the two center columns, dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, the triumph of the Gothic is complete, and their ascending lines melt without break into the capitals where they terminate with the pure form of early Gothic leaf-bud.

Further advanced, more exuberant and riotous in ornament, is the Gothic style as exemplified in the furniture. The earliest examples shown are, with one exception, late Gothic, dating from the fifteenth century. This exception takes the form of two choir-stall side panels with carved saints (fig. 2) belonging to the fourteenth century, the "Golden Age" of the Gothic style, and possibly from Notre-Dame in Paris. Their geometrical framework of circles and pointed arches is sharply di-

vided from the figures and graceful, ascending lines of foliage ornament with

which it is interspersed, and in some instances, as in the figure of St. Francis receiving the stigmata, the symbolism itself seems harmonized with this soaring line.

In the French furniture of the fifteenth century the pure form of the Gothic arch has disappeared and with it the simplicity of outline and relief. Several chest fronts and one complete chest (fig. 1) are splendid examples of the period. The aim of the creators of this flamboyant style was to eliminate any impression of heaviness in their material and transform the flat surface into a delicately ornamented framework. Geometrical lines and realistically depicted foliage melt



FIG. 2. END OF A CHOIR STALL FRENCH, FOURTEENTH CENTURY

into each other and produce a restless, flickering play of line, in which there is

primarily a painter-like feeling for the values of light and shade; the relief, too, appears to be higher in some places, in an effort to lure the eye of the beholder from an impression of flat surface.

Compared to the fantastic richness of decoration displayed by the French fur-



FIG. 3. SEAT WITH BALDACHINO FLEMISH (NORTH FRENCH?), FIFTEENTH CENTURY

niture, that of Flemish origin seems comparatively simple and the carved figures somewhat heavy. The most important pieces are the two large choir stalls placed in the center of the collection, two cabinets, and a seat with a baldachino (fig. 3). In place of the flamboyant ornament there is here a frequent use of the so-called "parchment-scroll" pattern, for whose introduction the above-mentioned



FIG. 4. CABINET
FLEMISH, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

tendency was responsible—namely, the desire to break the smooth surface by the play of light and shade afforded by relief. Especially in the baldachino of the seat has the artist striven by a delicate open-work pattern to eliminate all flat surface not necessary to the construction, and, on the other hand, to accentuate the framework by pilasters, while in the cabinet illustrated (fig. 4) the richest decoration is applied to that section on which the eye first falls.

III. TAPESTRIES

The possession of tapestries was, at the end of the Middle Ages, a luxury almost solely restricted to princely houses. These hangings were, however, so highly prized at court that they possessed a political significance, as they were frequently bestowed upon nobles as a mark of their prince's favor, or were exchanged as gifts

between princes. The favorite subjects for portrayal were naturally scenes from court life, or subjects that lent themselves to splendor and pomp, especially in the depicting of the costumes, such as scenes from the French legends, allegories, or incidents from Biblical history. The Gobelins tapestries, especially, gained an immense importance from the encouragement lavished on this industry by the art-loving Dukes of Burgundy.

The tapestries dating from the Middle Ages fall into two groups: an earlier group, woven principally at Arras at the time of the Burgundian dominion, about 1430–1480; and a later one of Brussels origin, dating from about 1480 to 1520, after the overthrow of the Burgundians. Both of these groups are splendidly illustrated in the Hoentschel collection.

To the Burgundian period belongs Mr. J. P. Morgan's earlier gift, the tapestries

portraying the Seven Sacraments (1430–1440), as well as a splendid piece illustrating the story of Esther (fig. 5). These works are dominated by the same powerful and heroic spirit that animated all works of art created under the Bur-

gundian rule. The figures depicted on the Esther tapestry are rude and vigorous, and the gestures, even the folds and fashion of their garments, all express a striving for majestic, almost monumental, expression. The same strength



FIG. 5. BURGUNDIAN TAPESTRY
STORY OF ESTHER,
MIDDLE OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY

gundian rule—the sculptures of Claus Sluter, as well as the paintings of the Maître de Flémalle and Roger van der Weyden. It is the artistic expression of a powerful if quickly exhausted race of rulers in whom for the first time the individualistic ideas of the Renaissance

is exhibited in the coloring, which reminds one of that of the stained-glass windows of the early Middle Ages. It is not unlikely that this piece belongs to the suite of tapestries portraying the history of Esther which John Grenier of Arras made for Charles the Bold in 1450, and

which after the fall of that prince became the spoil of his victorious opponent. This would explain a noticeable similarity to the style of Roger van der Weyden, who, like Grenier, came from Touraine, and who made the drawings for some Burgundian tapestries now to be found in Berne.

More nearly allied to the Brussels tapestries are two hangings portraying scenes from the youth of Christ—the Slaughter of the Innocents, and the Presentation in the Temple. These date from about 1480 and the drawing seems to indicate a south-Flemish origin. The scenes are intensely dramatic and rendered with a naïve force. Four other pieces, three of them allegorical subjects, the fourth a hunting scene, belong to the best period of the Brussels output. Pieces of this description, similar in drawing but widely different in technical merit, have been preserved in large numbers—certainly a hundred or more—and prove how much prized these tapestry hangings were at the fall of the Burgundian dominion.

The name of one of the Brussels masters, Jean de Rome, who executed cartoons for tapestries of this kind, has re-

cently come to light, and our tapestries show marked similarity to his work. The style is more advanced than that of the Burgundian artists, the figures more elegant and refined in expression, but they have lost something of force and power. The colors, especially in the two pieces hung to the right and left of the Biron monument, have become paler and more delicate. They show, too, a sense of perspective and a more plastic modeling of the figures, which differentiates them from the flat, purely decorative treatment of the older works.

This may be described as the culminating period of the Flemish art of the Middle Ages, for it was not until the second half of the sixteenth century that the influence of the school of Raphael led the northern tapestry weavers away from their national tendencies toward a reflection of the Italian style in which the original splendor of coloring was replaced by a more or less uniform green tint. This change is illustrated by a small tapestry hanging in the last alcove on the left side of the hall depicting cavaliers and ladies in the costume of the second half of the sixteenth century.

W. V.

